# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN SOUTHERN DIVISION

RONALD LIGHT,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 1:25-cv-514

v.

Honorable Phillip J. Green

DALE BONN, et al.,

Defendants.

### **OPINION**

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The Court has granted Plaintiff leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* in a separate order. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(c) and Rule 73 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Plaintiff consented to proceed in all matters in this action under the jurisdiction of a United States Magistrate Judge. (ECF No. 1, PageID.6.)

This case is presently before the Court for preliminary review under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996) (PLRA), pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court is required to conduct this initial review prior to the service of the complaint. See In re Prison Litig. Reform Act, 105 F.3d 1131, 1131, 1134 (6th Cir. 1997); McGore v. Wrigglesworth, 114 F.3d 601, 604–05 (6th Cir. 1997). Service of the complaint on the named defendants is of particular significance in defining a putative defendant's relationship to the proceedings.

"An individual or entity named as a defendant is not obliged to engage in litigation unless notified of the action, and brought under a court's authority, by formal process." Murphy Bros., Inc. v. Michetti Pipe Stringing, Inc., 526 U.S. 344, 347 (1999). "Service of process, under longstanding tradition in our system of justice, is fundamental to any procedural imposition on a named defendant." Id. at 350. "[O]ne becomes a party officially, and is required to take action in that capacity, only upon service of a summons or other authority-asserting measure stating the time within which the party served must appear and defend." Id. (citations omitted). That is, "[u]nless a named defendant agrees to waive service, the summons continues to function as the sine qua non directing an individual or entity to participate in a civil action or forgo procedural or substantive rights." Id. at 351. Therefore, the PLRA, by requiring courts to review and even resolve a plaintiff's claims before service, creates a circumstance where there may only be one party to the proceeding—the plaintiff—at the district court level and on appeal. See, e.g., Conway v. Fayette Cnty. Gov't, 212 F. App'x 418 (6th Cir. 2007) ("Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the district court screened the complaint and dismissed it without prejudice before service was made upon any of the defendants . . . [such that] . . . only [the plaintiff] [wa]s a party to this appeal.").

Here, Plaintiff has consented to a United States Magistrate Judge conducting all proceedings in this case under 28 U.S.C. § 636(c). That statute provides that "[u]pon the consent of the parties, a full-time United States magistrate judge . . . may conduct any or all proceedings . . . and order the entry of judgment in the case . . . ."

28 U.S.C. § 636(c). Because the named Defendants have not yet been served, the undersigned concludes that they are not presently parties whose consent is required to permit the undersigned to conduct a preliminary review under the PLRA, in the same way they are not parties who will be served with or given notice of this opinion. See Neals v. Norwood, 59 F.3d 530, 532 (5th Cir. 1995) ("The record does not contain a consent from the defendants[; h]owever, because they had not been served, they were not parties to this action at the time the magistrate entered judgment."). 1

Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996) (PLRA), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A; 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must read Plaintiff's pro se complaint indulgently, see Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff's allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, the Court will dismiss Plaintiff's complaint for failure to state a claim.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> But see Coleman v. Lab. & Indus. Rev. Comm'n of Wis., 860 F.3d 461, 471 (7th Cir. 2017) (concluding that, when determining which parties are required to consent to proceed before a United States Magistrate Judge under 28 U.S.C. § 636(c), "context matters" and the context the United States Supreme Court considered in Murphy Bros. was nothing like the context of a screening dismissal pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c)); Williams v. King, 875 F.3d 500, 503–04 (9th Cir. 2017) (relying on Black's Law Dictionary for the definition of "parties" and not addressing Murphy Bros.); Burton v. Schamp, 25 F.4th 198, 207 n.26 (3d Cir. 2022) (premising its discussion of "the term 'parties' solely in relation to its meaning in Section 636(c)(1), and . . . not tak[ing] an opinion on the meaning of 'parties' in other contexts").

# **Discussion**

#### I. Factual Allegations

Plaintiff is presently incarcerated with the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) at the Ionia Correctional Facility (ICF) in Ionia, Ionia County, Michigan. The events about which he complains occurred while Plaintiff was a prisoner at that facility. Plaintiff sues ICF Warden Dale Bonn, ICF Medical Staff Provider Unknown Party #1, and Sparrow Ionia Hospital Lab Technician Kenneth Thorp in their personal capacities. (ECF No. 1, PageID.2.)

Plaintiff alleges that June 15, 2023, he was taken to Sparrow Ionia Hospital because of chest pain, shortness of breath, and high blood pressure. (*Id.*, PageID.3.) Once Plaintiff arrived at the hospital, it was discovered that his arteries were 95% blocked. The doctor, Dr. Powers, ordered that a CAT scan be performed on Plaintiff. (*Id.*)

After Plaintiff arrived in the lab, Defendant Thorp asked Plaintiff to place his arms above his head. This proved to be difficult because Plaintiff was cuffed to a "black box." (*Id.*, PageID.3–4.) Rather than have the transport officers remove the cuffs from Plaintiff's wrists, Defendant Thorp again told Plaintiff to place his arms over his head. (*Id.*) Plaintiff did the best he could to comply with the instruction. (*Id.*) Defendant Thorp then attempted to start an IV in Plaintiff's left arm in order to administer dye into his veins. However, Defendant Thorp failed to realize that the IV was not in Plaintiff's vein, and a hypoechoic collection of fluids began to form in Plaintiff's muscle tissue. (*Id.*)

Plaintiff began to feel a burning in his left arm and yelled, "Hey my arm is hurting!" (*Id.*, PageID.4–5.) Defendant Thorp then stated that it would only take a couple more seconds and went to get a second tube of dye. (*Id.*) One of the transport officers then told Plaintiff to "man up" and to let Defendant Thorp do his job. (*Id.*) Defendant Thorp finally realized that the needle was not correctly placed in Plaintiff's vein and he attempted to reinsert the needle three times. Plaintiff states that Doctor Powers eventually inserted an IV needle correctly in Plaintiff's right arm because his left arm was too swollen. (*Id.*, PageID.5.)

Plaintiff states that he was later taken to McLaren Hospital and that at this point the pain in his left arm worsened, and he required pain medication. (*Id.*) Despite the pain medication, Plaintiff was unable to sleep through the night because of the pain in his arm. (*Id.*) Plaintiff asserts that in the following days, he was rushed into surgery for his heart. Plaintiff continues to suffer from pain in his arm and has become paranoid, believing that ICF health care staff are trying to kill him before he goes home. (*Id.*)

Plaintiff states that Defendant Thorp was deliberately indifferent to his complaints of pain after Plaintiff told Defendant Thorp that his arm was hurting and that this conduct violated the Eighth Amendment. (*Id.*) Plaintiff claims that Defendants ICF Warden Bonn and ICF Medical Provider Unknown Party #1 "caused" the "deprivation. (*Id.*) Plaintiff seeks damages. (*Id.*, PageID.6.)

### II. Failure to State a Claim

A complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim if it fails "to give the defendant fair notice of what the . . . claim is and the grounds upon which it rests."

Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (quoting Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41, 47 (1957)). While a complaint need not contain detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff's allegations must include more than labels and conclusions. *Id.*; Ashcroft v. Igbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) ("Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice."). The court must determine whether the complaint contains "enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face." Twombly, 550 U.S. at 570. "A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." Igbal, 556 U.S. at Although the plausibility standard is not equivalent to a "probability 679. requirement,' . . . it asks for more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully." Id. at 678 (quoting Twombly, 550 U.S. at 556). "[W]here the wellpleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged—but it has not 'show[n]'—that the pleader is entitled to relief." Id. at 679 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2)); see also Hill v. Lappin, 630 F.3d 468, 470–71 (6th Cir. 2010) (holding that the Twombly/Iqbal plausibility standard applies to dismissals of prisoner cases on initial review under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii)).

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am., 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996).

Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

## A. Defendants Bonn and Unknown Party #1

Plaintiff makes no allegations against Defendant Bonn or Defendant Unknown Party #1. The only reference to them in the body of the complaint is as follows: "[Plaintiff was] subjected . . . to a deliberate and or an unreasonable lack of, proper medical treatment and care, when he was deprived of his (8th) Amendment rights and priviledges [sic] as a[n] "Institutionalized" U.S. Citizen, to be FREE from Cruel and Unusual Punaishment, as this deprivation was caused by Warden Bonn, I-max's medical staff provider, [and] . . . (K. Thorp) . . . ." (Compl., ECF No. 1, PageID.5.) It is plain that Plaintiff blames Defendants Bonn and the unknown medical provider at ICF for violating his Eighth Amendment rights; he just fails to provide any factual basis for his assignment of blame.

It is a basic pleading essential that a plaintiff attribute factual allegations to particular defendants. See Twombly, 550 U.S. at 545 (holding that, in order to state a claim, a plaintiff must make sufficient allegations to give a defendant fair notice of the claim). Where a person is named as a defendant without an allegation of specific conduct, the complaint is subject to dismissal, even under the liberal construction afforded to pro se complaints. See Gilmore v. Corr. Corp. of Am., 92 F. App'x 188, 190 (6th Cir. 2004) (dismissing complaint where plaintiff failed to allege how any named defendant was involved in the violation of his rights); Frazier v. Michigan, 41 F. App'x

762, 764 (6th Cir. 2002) (dismissing plaintiff's claims where the complaint did not allege with any degree of specificity which of the named defendants were personally involved in or responsible for each alleged violation of rights); *Griffin v. Montgomery*, No. 00-3402, 2000 WL 1800569, at \*2 (6th Cir. Nov. 30, 2000) (requiring allegations of personal involvement against each defendant); *Rodriguez v. Jabe*, No. 90-1010, 1990 WL 82722, at \*1 (6th Cir. June 19, 1990) ("Plaintiff's claims against those individuals are without a basis in law as the complaint is totally devoid of allegations as to them which would suggest their involvement in the events leading to his injuries"). Because Plaintiff fails to make any factual allegations against Defendants Bonn and Unknown Party #1, he has failed to state a claim against them on which relief may be granted.

# B. Defendant Thorp

Plaintiff names Kenneth Thorp as a Defendant and states that he is employed as a lab technician at Sparrow Ionia Hospital. (ECF No. 1, PageID.2.) To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); Dominguez v. Corr. Med. Servs., 555 F.3d 543, 549 (6th Cir. 2009); Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am., 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). In order for a private party's conduct to be under color of state law, it must be "fairly attributable to the State." Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co., 457 U.S. 922, 937 (1982); Street, 102 F.3d at 814. There must be "a sufficiently close nexus between the State and the challenged action of

[the defendant] so that the action of the latter may be fairly treated as that of the State itself." Skelton v. Pri-Cor, Inc., 963 F.2d 100, 102 (6th Cir. 1991) (citing Jackson v. Metro. Edison Co., 419 U.S. 345, 351 (1974)).

Where the defendants are not state officials, their conduct will be deemed to constitute state action only if it meets one of three narrow tests. The first is the symbiotic relationship test, or nexus test, in which the inquiry focuses on whether "the State had so far insinuated itself into a position of interdependence with the [private party] that it was a joint participant in the enterprise." Jackson, 419 U.S. at 357–58. Second, the state compulsion test describes situations "in which the government has coerced or at least significantly encouraged the action alleged to violate the Constitution." NBC v. Commc'ns Workers of Am., 860 F.2d 1022, 1026 (11th Cir. 1988); accord Blum v. Yaretsky, 457 U.S. 991, 1004 (1982); Adickes v. S.H. Kress & Co., 398 U.S. 144, 170 (1970). Finally, the public function test covers private actors performing functions "traditionally the exclusive prerogative of the State." Jackson, 419 U.S. at 353; accord West, 487 U.S. at 49–50. See generally, Lugar, 457 U.S. at 936–39 (discussing three tests).

Plaintiff has not presented any allegations by which Defendant Thorp's conduct could be fairly attributed to the State. The fact that Defendant Thorp's employer may receive public funding does not render it him a "state actor" for purposes of § 1983. See Rendell-Baker v. Kohn, 457 U.S. 830, 840 (1982) (nonprofit, privately operated school's receipt of public funds did not make its employee discharge decisions acts of state subject to suit under federal statute governing civil

action for deprivation of rights); Adams v. Vandemark, 855 F.2d 312, 315-16 (6th Cir. 1988) (fact that nonprofit corporation was funded almost entirely by public sources, and was subject to state regulation, without more, is insufficient to make private entity's decision to discharge employees attributable to state for purpose of § 1983 action). Even if Defendant treated Plaintiff at the state's request and expense, he did not thereby become a state actor. See Rendell-Baker, 457 U.S. at 841 ("[a]cts of such private contractors do not become acts of the government by reason of their significant or even total engagement in performing public contracts"); Bell v. Mgmt. and Training Corp., 122 F. App'x 219, 223 (6th Cir. 2005) (private company operating state corrections facilities is not a state actor).

Moreover, even if Defendant Thorp were a state actor, Plaintiff's Eighth Amendment claim against him fails to state a claim. The Eighth Amendment prohibits the infliction of cruel and unusual punishment against those convicted of crimes. U.S. Const. amend. VIII. The Eighth Amendment obligates prison authorities to provide medical care to incarcerated individuals, as a failure to provide such care would be inconsistent with contemporary standards of decency. Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 103–04 (1976). The Eighth Amendment is violated when a prison official is deliberately indifferent to the serious medical needs of a prisoner. Id. at 104–05; Comstock v. McCrary, 273 F.3d 693, 702 (6th Cir. 2001).

Deliberate indifference may be manifested by a doctor's failure to respond to the medical needs of a prisoner, or by "prison guards in intentionally denying or delaying access to medical care or intentionally interfering with the treatment once prescribed. Regardless of how evidenced, deliberate indifference to a prisoner's serious illness or injury states a cause of action under § 1983." *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 104–05.

A claim for the deprivation of adequate medical care has an objective and a subjective component. Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 834 (1994). To satisfy the objective component, the plaintiff must allege that the medical need at issue is sufficiently serious. Id. In other words, the inmate must show that he is incarcerated under conditions posing a substantial risk of serious harm. Id. The objective component of the adequate medical care test is satisfied "[w]here the seriousness of a prisoner's need for medical care is obvious even to a lay person." Blackmore v. Kalamazoo Cnty., 390 F.3d 890, 899 (6th Cir. 2004); see also Phillips v. Roane Cnty., 534 F.3d 531, 539–40 (6th Cir. 2008). Obviousness, however, is not strictly limited to what is detectable to the eye. Even if the layman cannot see the medical need, a condition may be obviously medically serious where a layman, if informed of the true medical situation, would deem the need for medical attention clear. See, e.g., Rouster v. Saginaw Cnty., 749 F.3d 437, 446–51 (6th Cir. 2014) (holding that a prisoner who died from a perforated duodenum exhibited an "objectively serious need for medical treatment," even though his symptoms appeared to the medical staff at the time to be consistent with alcohol withdrawal); Johnson v. Karnes, 398 F.3d 868, 874 (6th Cir. 2005) (holding that prisoner's severed tendon was a "quite obvious" medical need, since "any lay person would realize to be serious," even though the condition was not visually obvious). If the plaintiff's claim, however, is based on "the prison's failure to treat a condition adequately, or where the prisoner's affliction is seemingly minor or non-obvious," *Blackmore*, 390 F.3d at 898, the plaintiff must "place verifying medical evidence in the record to establish the detrimental effect of the delay in medical treatment," *Napier v. Madison Cnty.*, 238 F.3d 739, 742 (6th Cir. 2001) (internal quotation marks omitted), *abrogation on other grounds recognized by Lawler as next friend of Lawler v. Hardiman Cnty.*, *Tenn.*, 93 F.4th 919 (6th Cir. 2024).

The subjective component requires an inmate to show that prison officials have "a sufficiently culpable state of mind" in denying medical care. *Brown v. Bargery*, 207 F.3d 863, 867 (6th Cir. 2000). Deliberate indifference "entails something more than mere negligence," but can be "satisfied by something less than acts or omissions for the very purpose of causing harm or with knowledge that harm will result." *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 835. "[T]he official must both be aware of facts from which the inference could be drawn that a substantial risk of serious harm exists, and he must also draw the inference." *Id.* at 837. To prove a defendant's subjective knowledge, "[a] plaintiff may rely on circumstantial evidence . . . : A jury is entitled to 'conclude that a prison official knew of a substantial risk from the very fact that the risk was obvious." *Rhinehart v. Scutt*, 894 F.3d 721, 738 (6th Cir. 2018) (quoting *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 842)).

However, not every claim by a prisoner that he has received inadequate medical treatment states a violation of the Eighth Amendment. *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 105. As the Supreme Court explained:

[A]n inadvertent failure to provide adequate medical care cannot be said to constitute an unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain or to be repugnant to the conscience of mankind. Thus, a complaint that a physician has been negligent in diagnosing or treating a medical condition does not state a valid claim of medical mistreatment under the Eighth Amendment. Medical malpractice does not become a constitutional violation merely because the victim is a prisoner. In order to state a cognizable claim, a prisoner must allege acts or omissions sufficiently harmful to evidence deliberate indifference to serious medical needs.

Id. at 105–06 (quotations omitted). Thus, differences in judgment between an inmate and prison medical personnel regarding the appropriate medical diagnoses or treatment are not enough to state a deliberate indifference claim. Darrah v. Krisher, 865 F.3d 361, 372 (6th Cir. 2017); Briggs v. Westcomb, 801 F. App'x 956, 959 (6th Cir. 2020); Mitchell v. Hininger, 553 F. App'x 602, 605 (2014). This is so even if the misdiagnosis results in an inadequate course of treatment and considerable suffering. Gabehart v. Chapleau, No. 96-5050, 1997 WL 160322, at \*2 (6th Cir. Apr. 4, 1997).

The Sixth Circuit distinguishes "between cases where the complaint alleges a complete denial of medical care and those cases where the claim is that a prisoner received inadequate medical treatment." Westlake v. Lucas, 537 F.2d 857, 860 n.5 (6th Cir. 1976). If "a prisoner has received some medical attention and the dispute is over the adequacy of the treatment, federal courts are generally reluctant to second guess medical judgments and to constitutionalize claims which sound in state tort law." Id.; see also Rouster, 749 F.3d at 448; Perez v. Oakland Cnty., 466 F.3d 416, 434 (6th Cir. 2006); Kellerman v. Simpson, 258 F. App'x 720, 727 (6th Cir. 2007); McFarland v. Austin, 196 F. App'x 410 (6th Cir. 2006); Edmonds v. Horton, 113 F. App'x 62, 65 (6th Cir. 2004); Brock v. Crall, 8 F. App'x 439, 440–41 (6th Cir. 2001); Berryman v. Rieger, 150 F.3d 561, 566 (6th Cir. 1998). "Where the claimant received

treatment for his condition, as here, he must show that his treatment was 'so woefully inadequate as to amount to no treatment at all." *Mitchell*, 553 F. App'x at 605 (quoting *Alspaugh v. McConnell*, 643 F.3d 162, 169 (6th Cir. 2011)). He must demonstrate that the care he received was "so grossly incompetent, inadequate, or excessive as to shock the conscience or to be intolerable to fundamental fairness." *See Miller v. Calhoun Cnty.*, 408 F.3d 803, 819 (6th Cir. 2005) (quoting *Waldrop v. Evans*, 871 F.2d 1030, 1033 (11th Cir. 1989)).

In this case, Plaintiff alleges that Defendant Thorp either improperly inserted the IV needle in his left arm or that he failed to recognize that it had become dislodged, and that this resulted in fluid being infused into Plaintiff's muscles, causing swelling and soreness. Plaintiff asserts that Defendant Thorp initially ignored Plaintiff's complaints of pain, stating that it would only take a couple more seconds. (ECF No. 1, PageID.4–5.) Plaintiff contends that this demonstrates deliberate indifference.

However, Plaintiff also alleges that when Defendant Thorp realized that the needle was not in Plaintiff's vein, he attempted to reinsert the needle and that the doctor finally inserted the needle in Plaintiff's other arm. (*Id.*, PageID.5.) Despite Plaintiff's assertion to the contrary, the facts alleged in the complaint show that Defendant Thorp did not continue to infuse dye into Plaintiff's muscle once he became aware of the fact that the needle was not in Plaintiff's vein. Such allegations do not support an inference that Defendant Thorp disregarded a risk of harm to Plaintiff. Because Plaintiff has failed to allege sufficient facts regarding the subjective prong,

he has failed to state a claim against Defendant Thorp on which relief may be

granted.

Conclusion

Having conducted the review required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the

Court determines that Plaintiff's complaint will be dismissed for failure to state a

claim, under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The

Court must next decide whether an appeal of this action would be in good faith within

the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). See McGore v. Wrigglesworth, 114 F.3d 601,

611 (6th Cir. 1997). For the same reasons the Court concludes that Plaintiff's claims

are properly dismissed, the Court also concludes that any issue Plaintiff might raise

on appeal would be frivolous. Coppedge v. United States, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962).

Accordingly, the Court certifies that an appeal would not be taken in good faith.

Should Plaintiff appeal this decision, the Court will assess the \$605.00 appellate

filing fee pursuant to § 1915(b)(1), see McGore, 114 F.3d at 610-11.

This is a dismissal as described by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

A judgment consistent with this opinion will be entered.

Dated: May 19, 2025

/s/ Phillip J. Green

PHILLIP J. GREEN

United States Magistrate Judge

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